

Crime, Peoples and Places

Perspectives on Rural Safety and Justice

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Chapter 30

**Future directions for rural crime
research, policy and practice**

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30 Future directions for rural crime research, policy and practice

Alistair Harkness and Vania Ceccato

Introduction

This chapter maps the key issues identified in the 19 country studies outlined in earlier chapters of this volume and synthesises recommendations for both additional research and for policy and practice. The central aims of chapters in this book have been two-fold: first, to produce empirical data on rural and farm crime internationally; and second, to improve conceptual and analytical frameworks to assess crime in rural settings – crime which is regularly stereotyped.

Much has been written about the mythology of the so-called rural idyll in recent years (see for example Harris & Harkness, 2016; Woods, 2011; Yarwood, 2005), and so this key issue will not be reproduced here. Nevertheless, it is a truism that this factor impacts on both research agendas and also police and practice reforms. That is, without substantive and statistically reliable data – whether obtained through crime reporting or through scholarly study – decision makers are oftentimes unable to justify reform agendas or provide increased resource allocations, and rather act upon what might feel best: on anecdotal perspectives; informal advice; or upon pressure for vested interests.

This chapter, therefore, offers a road map for scholars seeking to expand on the research contained in this volume, and for practitioners keen to respond to crime and improve safety in rural areas. This is based on the recommendations of the authors of the 19 country profile chapters in this book, with additional reflections on ‘what is best next’: note that not all the recommendations which follow emanate from those of country profile contributors. Also, the suite of recommendations offered here, it ought to be noted, is not exhaustive and readers are reminded that what may work in one context may not be suitable, effective or indeed even possible in another. This chapter is structured around common issues, proposals for future research and recommendations for policy and practice reform. Table 30.1 provides a synthesis of these observations for each of the 19 countries.

Common issues across non-dichotomous contexts

A key observation, worthy of repetition and reflection, is that even though rural areas are often categorised simply as places that are ‘non-urban’, no two are identical even within the same political borders: the ‘rural’ is, quite simply, not homogenous. This point is underscored because, while chapters in this book draw upon original empirical research conducted in 19 different countries, recommendations for research and reform may not present a ‘cookie cutter’ approach. That is, what might be an effective data collection strategy or policy approach in one location might not be so in another: there can be no ‘one size fits all’ approach.

Context matters. In Australia for example, the Northern Territory has a population of less than 250,000 people spread across an area of some 1.3 million square kilometres, an area just slightly greater than the size of Peru. Agriculture in the Northern Territory is dominated by extremely large cattle stations: the biggest is Anna Creek Station with an area of 23,677 square kilometres, bigger than Slovenia with a size of 20,273 square kilometres and a population of just over 2.1 million people. Crime prevention and control and criminal justice responses are then, of course, going to be much, much different.

Some crimes are omnipresent regardless of geography and demography: family violence, for instance is not constrained to any particular location or position on the socio-economic spectrum. There are, though, some quintessential rural crimes: theft of livestock, for instance, is not going to occur on the streets of a major city where the livestock are not present (Barclay, 2016). Rural areas – and farms particularly – can present opportunities for offending to occur which do not exist in urban or peri-urban settings, for example through various socio-demographic factors such as relaxed attitudes to security and changing populations; geographic and evidence factors such as remoteness; and specific crime prevention behaviours such as property left unattended and unlocked away from any forms of capable guardianship (Harkness & Larkins, 2020, p. 229).

A common feature of many of the survey datasets reported on in this volume is the high rates of victimisation but low rates of reporting to police (see Table 30.1). There are numerous reasons – institutional, evidence and community – for this under-reporting (see Harkness & Larkins, 2020, p. 230). Lack of crime prevention awareness and uptake of crime prevention practices is also a significant issue. An interesting finding from Nigeria (Chapter 15) is the propensity for rural farmers to do nothing other than offer prayers to prevent farm theft – a form of spiritual crime prevention, perhaps, which raises issues around responsibility for crime prevention.

Another key issue across the 19 countries is a lack of trust and confidence in police, and this has direct impacts on the willingness to or desirability of rural residents to report victimisation. There are various explanations for this tendency, not least because of the accessibility of police, they being much

Table 30.1 Synthesis of key issues, and recommendations for research and policy and practice reforms

Country	Key issues identified	Recommendations for research	Recommendations for policy and practice reform
Argentina (Chapter 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intimate partner violence • requests for bribes from rural people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broaden the scope of the <i>AmericasBarometer</i> survey to address the specific circumstances of self-reported victimisation • improve existing survey instruments and design new ones to assess the causes of women's subjective and objective unsafety • produce data at finest geographical level beyond the urban versus rural dichotomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance data integration and seek out new data sources to support rural safety • empower rural women socially and economically to reduce vulnerability to abuse, combined with engaging men on the prevention of gender-based violence • strengthen the accountability of law enforcement institutions to effectively combat corruption
Australia (Chapter 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • levels of farmer victimisation • worry about victimisation and confidence in police • lack of reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine the efforts of rural specific police units (in a variety of international contexts) as they work to reduce worry and increase confidence • determine the impacts of specialised rural crime police on preventing and combating rural crime • assess perceptions of farmers in other Australian jurisdictions in addition to Victoria and New South Wales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support ongoing education campaigns farmers to implement preventative measures to target harden • foster engaged and cooperative partnerships with farmers in combating rural crime through specialised rural policing teams • implement integrated, proactive and community-oriented strategies to reduce worry about crime, improve attitudes towards the police and build confidence in their ability to address rural crime

(Continued)

Table 30.1 (Continued)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Key issues identified</i>	<i>Recommendations for research</i>	<i>Recommendations for policy and practice reform</i>
Brazil (Chapter 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rural women are more victimised by all types of interpersonal crimes than those living in urban areas • victimisation of farmers by multiple types of property crimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct face-to-face surveys with a representative sample of the rural population • deploy local surveys in different Brazilian states to test for territorial dimensions and regional disparity across rural areas • conduct focus groups with rural producers to better understand the main issues related to victimisation, perceptions of violence, trust in the police and crime prevention • consider the impact of poverty, unemployment and other factors such as age and ethnic differences on crime and victimisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create (or strengthen existing) emergency security programs and provide the Environmental Police the additional mission of combating rural crime • increase law enforcement efforts in areas of the urban fringe and urban area to reduce property crime • increase support for victims of interpersonal crimes in the rural areas, specifically for women victims of domestic violence • implement long-term programs to address gender-based violence in rural areas
Chile (Chapter 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • geographic and social characteristics create regional conditions affecting crime, victimisation and contact with the police • visibility of safety needs for rural communities difficult • Chilean government agencies are highly centralised • urban-rural crime data desegregation does not capture issues adequately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create and deploy a national rural victimisation survey • assess impacts of the highly structured data system on patterns of low reporting in rural areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decentralise process for public safety and crime prevention, provide more resources and capabilities to local policy actors and agencies located closer to the rural communities and territories to assign responses and initiatives • include rural crime and justice indicators as part of the National Policy of Rural Development as a comprehensive element to measure the quality of life in these communities • involve local people and police personnel in crafting strategies and implementation of policy change

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Table 30.1 (Continued)

Country	Key issues identified	Recommendations for research	Recommendations for policy and practice reform
England (Chapter 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other than farm theft, speeding, fly tipping and hare coursing are of most concern • non-reporting of farm crimes to police • low confidence in police, courts and sentencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore the behavioural underpinning of reasons for low levels of crime reporting • survey to access factors affecting low levels of trust among farming communities towards police • evaluate the choice architecture around crime prevention decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • police to act on building trust with farming communities via better in-person liaison rather than relying on social media engagement • make it easier to report crimes and for the recording of farm crime to be more coordinated • need for the wider criminal justice system to play a part in increasing farmer confidence in relation to prosecution and sentencing of offenders charged with farm theft offences • police to extend and innovate their crime prevention advice for farmers to tackle increasingly sophisticated offenders, and to employ behavioural science techniques to enable farmers to make effective and efficient crime prevention decisions to protect their farms
Germany (Chapter 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • theft from farms seems to be quite wide-spread • under-reporting of thefts from farms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct nation-wide survey with a larger sample • assess issues around police trust though mixed-methods data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include two questions on 12-month prevalence of theft in national and stolen goods in official agriculture survey to get a baseline at regular intervals • recognise rural areas as places where crimes occur • retain small police stations in rural areas

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Table 30.1 (Continued)

Country	Key issues identified	Recommendations for research	Recommendations for policy and practice reform
India (Chapter 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • police lack the technology to address crime • poor uptake of crime prevention measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determine reasons for travel to and from the farm and understanding new distinctions between farm workers and farm owners • conduct geographically disbursed studies of farm crime across India, including places adjacent to farming premises and/or linked to routes based on transit/road connectivity supporting out-migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase local police resources to foster reliance on the police's ability to address theft and threats of harm and encourage local crime reporting • encourage local police to understand and address the criminal exposure of an increasingly transient population of farmers and farm workers • the after-effect of programs helping rural residents must be reviewed to understand disparate impacts on women's safety
Ireland (Chapter 11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • antisocial crimes within farming communities, such as trespassing, illegal dumping, animal worrying and speeding and reckless driving • lack of crime prevention awareness/uptake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collect data on an ongoing basis to allow for determination of trends • conduct research that involves both members of the farming community and their organisations, and to conduct more specific research with the farming community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage the reporting of incidents of farm crime, regardless of how minor they may be perceived • provide farmers with more information and support on crime prevention measures and what would be appropriate for their individual farm • encourage greater communication and interaction between farmers and members of An Garda Síochána in order to develop trust and encourage the reporting of incidents of farm crime • collect data on an ongoing and regular basis on farm crime: this research should involve both members of the farming community and their organisations • official statistics might be improved by indicating that an offence was recorded on a farm

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Table 30.1 (Continued)

Country	Key issues identified	Recommendations for research	Recommendations for policy and practice reform
Japan (Chapter 12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • patterns of victimisation (e.g. types of locations with high theft risk) is different from urban to rural • prevention behaviour for vehicle theft is different among the rural population • opportunity structure of crime differs from urban to rural areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct surveys focused on the rural population, including farmers as well as other rural inhabitants • collect data from multiple secondary data sources to help understand patterns of rural crime and the development of effective anti-crime measures specific to rural areas • develop an environmental criminology approach to assist in understanding patterns of victimisation and the effectiveness of crime prevention interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address the challenge which rural police headquarters have in maintaining their own crime analysis sections • local-level collaboration among the police, government and university professors would be helpful to promote evidence-based crime prevention efforts • implement problem-oriented policing initiatives
Kenya (Chapter 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relationship between farm crime and food security and livelihood development • non-reporting of farm theft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus on other counties in Kenya that have different economic rural profiles to confirm the findings of this study • research on theft of cash crops that government is promoting such as avocado and macadamia • survey of police views of crime in rural areas • examine the spatial distribution of different types of farm thefts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support situational crime prevention measures that target factors that generate motivated offenders or improving target hardening strategies • formalise partnerships between government, community and farmers and invest in the education of farmers regarding farm security • encourage and support community-based security systems such as community-based policing • government to support farmers by tightening regulatory frameworks, especially in relation to the sale of farm inputs • police and courts to treat farm crimes as serious criminal activity that has an impact on the economy of the country

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Table 30.1 (Continued)

Country	Key issues identified	Recommendations for research	Recommendations for policy and practice reform
New Zealand (Chapter 14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high victimisation rates of farmers • influence of media around the under-resourcing of the police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigate the risk of using media rhetoric to sway government resourcing issues • investigate farmers' attitudes towards reporting crime, including identifying barriers to reporting crime, and identifying means of improving engagement with police • investigate police communication methods and processes with victims of farm crime and how this impacts victims' relationship with police • investigating the efficacy of crime prevention measures in a New Zealand context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage reporting of crime to police through enhanced engagement techniques • explore alternative ways of communicating to farmers who report incidents that may be difficult for police to follow up
Nigeria (Chapter 15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high victimisation rates of farmers • low levels of trust in police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine temporal patterns to determine whether patterns are stable over a period of time • theoretical development of rural criminology in Africa • future research to understand patterns of rural crime/farm theft should use longitudinal datasets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • police to increase their presence across rural Nigeria to regain confidence from citizens • use of technology such as alarm systems would improve crime prevent and control efforts
Portugal (Chapter 16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • property crimes such as vehicle theft, robberies, burglaries and residential burglaries • low reporting rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • redeploy survey to obtain larger sample • conduct alternative data collection such as by using face-to-face and/or telephone surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance police presence and the community engagement in rural areas to address the low reporting rates among farmers and their lack of confidence in the police

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Table 30.1 (Continued)

Country	Key issues identified	Recommendations for research	Recommendations for policy and practice reform
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low trust/confidence in police • high worry about crime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collect data pertaining to other research questions, such as the influence of the type of farmers in the perceptions of safety, the police and the adoption of crime prevention practices • implement systematic large-scale surveys in Portuguese rural areas to understand the prevalence, types and perceptions of crime and safety • repeat the survey after five years using same survey instrument • conduct survey by visiting and interviewing farmers in person, followed by focus group interviews in farmer associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more active collaboration with agricultural associations to disseminate information, gather feedback from the farmers to understand the specific needs of this community • promote awareness of effective crime prevention strategies and importance of reporting crime
	<p>Slovenia (Chapter 17)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • theft, fraud, robbery and burglary, vandalism and damage to property • threats, damage to vineyards or orchards, deliberate scattering of rubbish, larceny, poaching on agricultural land or illegal felling of trees in forests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess perceptions of police to improve crime prevention and mutual relations • investigate the effectiveness of an array of crime prevention measures • develop an African-specific rural criminology theoretical framework • produce longitudinal datasets to better understand patterns of rural crimes
<p>South Africa (Chapter 18)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-reporting of property crimes • victimisation of farmers • severe fear of crime not based on official crime statistics or evidence-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve relations and trust between commercial and communal farming communities and the police • implement the approved Rural Safety Strategy • enhance the ability for use of technology in crime prevention • formalise cooperative agreements between private security and law enforcement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • re-introduce community policing and re-establish good relationships with local communities and residents • enhance police activities in (re)establishing communication with local residents to obtain information on their concerns and to upgrade farmers' crime preventative measures with an increased police presence • improve relations and trust between commercial and communal farming communities and the police • implement the approved Rural Safety Strategy • enhance the ability for use of technology in crime prevention • formalise cooperative agreements between private security and law enforcement

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Table 30.1 (Continued)

Country	Key issues identified	Recommendations for research	Recommendations for policy and practice reform
Spain (Chapter 19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-reporting of crime • low trust in the police and satisfaction with the reporting process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • replicate similar studies in other rural contexts, as the idiosyncrasies of each region can significantly influence the forms of response to victimisation • engage in qualitative studies using group techniques with representatives of neighbourhood communities living in rural areas and police forces to identify specific crime and safety issues and identify best practices for prevention and response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase police presence in rural areas • access control or video surveillance and automatic number plate registration of vehicles on access roads • legislative change to combat certain rural crimes such as dumping of waste • create community values education and other support programs for victims of interpersonal crimes
Sweden (Chapter 20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thefts, trespassing, harassment, vandalism, violence • under-reporting of crime • safety perceptions • low levels of trust in police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adjust the CRAVED model beyond the urban context • develop a research agenda that allows for data collection and better understanding of both victimisation and fear of crime • consider other types of crimes in rural areas (hate crimes, violence against women and environmental crimes) • further investigate the nature of the rural-urban continuum in relation to crime • investigate the challenges for police and other emergency services in remote rural areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve local police force practices to promote a better understanding of particular local problems and testing of methods adjusted to rural conditions • at a national level, a separate set of criminal codes could make it possible to track rural-related offences • create programs to support farmers as victims of crime, with common financial and emotional assistance across the country

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Table 30.1 (Continued)

Country	Key issues identified	Recommendations for research	Recommendations for policy and practice reform
United States (Chapter 21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • victimisation of farmers • fear of both personal and property victimisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • survey farms along the Southern border and communities that are predominantly Hispanic, LatinX, Black or Indigenous (which may report different degrees of trust or reporting with police) • translate survey questions, particularly into Spanish, to better capture the experiences of immigrant and non-English-speaking farmers • collect data on reporting methods to get a better sense of reporting structure and availability • deploy surveys at farm-related conferences to increase response rates and decrease the challenges that come with recruitment via social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop educational programs on crime prevention administered by local law enforcement to increase face-to-face non-enforcement encounters between law enforcement agencies and farmers • develop programs that focus on expanding the marking of livestock and property to increase the chances of tracking and return in the event of theft
Wales (Chapter 22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear-up rates and resources for investigations are significantly lacking • crime prevention has not kept pace in rural locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine opportunities for investment in crime prevention and detection technology • assess how building awareness of the impact of rural crime on communities and focus on producing tailored responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase engagement with social media for information, and reporting and the development of wider social networks • increase number of dedicated rural officers and wider implementation of social media channels to connect police and communities • provide more visible action in terms of dealing with offenders is necessary to avoid the slow erosion of trust and effective engagement • increase investment and relevant expertise to have an appreciable impact on preventing and prosecuting rural crime

more sparsely located in rural areas and in many instances possessing far fewer resources both in terms of personnel and funding. There are also concerns, by farmers particularly, that police will not take reports seriously, that there is nothing that they can do, and in some cases cultural attitudes that it is better to sort problems personally and informally rather than involve the police in order to avoid localised repercussions.

Under-reporting, then, has a flow-on effect for official data collection and appropriate resourcing. If crimes are not reported, they are *ipso facto* not recorded. Thus, those with centralised decision-making responsibility for resource allocation may be unaware of the true extent of the problem in a particular area. The existence of this so-called ‘dark figure’ of crime – where crimes are occurring but not being recorded – can lead to tensions and a further deterioration of confidence in police to ensure the safety of rural residents and to bring perpetrators of crime before formal criminal justice process.

One last overarching observation from the country profile chapters is that not all rural-specific crimes are necessarily property or violence oriented. In several instances, certain anti-social behaviours, such as illegal rubbish dumping on rural properties, speeding and dangerous driving, and in the United Kingdom context ‘hare-coursing’ cause both social and economic grief.

What is clear from the country profiles presented in this volume is that there are significant gaps in our collective knowledge. Thus, an enhanced focus on new scholarly research and on reforms are warranted.

Future directions of rural crime research

There has been enormous growth in rural crime scholarship since 2016, with the publication of Donnermeyer’s (2016) *Routledge Handbook of Rural Criminology*; the creation of two rural-crime specific book series (the *Routledge Studies in Rural Criminology* series and the Bristol University Press *Research in Rural Crime* series); the creation of the International Society for the Study of Rural Crime; the production of *The Encyclopedia of Rural Crime* (Harkness et al., 2023a, 2023b); a much more overt presence at various international conferences; and the offering of workshops, symposia and online roundtables with a rural criminological focus. Rural Criminology, as a distinct field of scholarly enquiry, is growing exponentially – as can be seen in the figure produced by Donnermeyer in the introduction to *The Encyclopedia of Rural Crime* (Harkness et al., 2023a, 2023b) which outlines a chronology of key developments since 2019.

Notwithstanding these energies, there remains a lack of empirical data in many quite widely divergent global contexts upon which analyses can be made. And, where data collection is occurring, as highlighted in Chapter 3, a variety of methodological approaches are adopted which limit the capacity for like-for-like comparative analysis to be possible.

Linking to sustainable rural development and social sustainability, Ceccato (2016) and Ceccato and Abraham (2022) highlight the future of research

and practice in rural criminology in the Open Access book *Crime and Safety in the Rural: Lessons from Research*, and a summary of the research agenda is provided by Abraham and Ceccato (2022).

Gaps in knowledge

There exist numerous knowledge gaps, both theoretical and empirical. At the end of many book chapters and articles, authors will include a section or concluding remarks that identify areas for further research – such as extending their own work, applying their work in different contexts and so on. However, these thoughtful contemplations for future work are often not acted upon – largely, perhaps, because they are not contained in a single repository when comparisons can be made and decisions made as well.

The quest to consolidate a list of theoretical and empirical gaps for future rural crime research, though, is well underway. Baker's (2016) concluding chapter to *Locating crime in context and place* (2016) advocates for an array of proposals for future research; and *The Encyclopedia of Rural Crime* (Harkness et al., 2023a, 2023b) provides 85 entries on a diversity of rural-related topics, each of which are worthy of expansion and further research. Considering theoretical gaps, Donnermeyer (2022) nominates 16 specific areas worthy of enhanced scholarly attention; and Ceccato and Abraham (2022, Chapter 8) detail a research agenda for rural criminological research.

It is not the intention for this chapter to mundanely reiterate the gaps identified by these and other scholars. Rather, what follows is a synthesis of recommendations which have emanated broadly from the research produced in preceding chapters of this volume, and the highlighting of some additional areas considered worthy of widespread international consideration, and ideally also collaborative and multi-disciplinary efforts in the spirit of this book. The establishment of a series of large research groups would be highly advantageous, perhaps structured around the four core strategies depicted in Figure 30.1 which provides a cloud of themes and specific areas of focus for future rural criminological research.

Definitions and theory

A vital starting point is the need for better definitions of rurality. There have been some scholarly attempts to achieve this, and there exists an array of schema used to measure what is meant by 'rural': in Australia alone, there are three official measures (Harris & Harkness, 2016). So, to clearly define 'rural', some universally agreed principals ought to be established, although it is naïve to think that a precise universal definition is possible: indeed, it is unwise to contemplate definitions beyond those which are single-dimensional, such as population size (Harkness et al., 2022). Likewise, there needs to be a much more cohesive attempt to theorise the nexus between social structure and crime.



Figure 30.1 Themes and specific areas of focus for future rural criminological research

Future studies might consider exploring fresh interpretations of the rural, encompassing the specificities of areas influenced by different levels of rural-urban connections, to more accurately elucidate their safety problems. Dewey (1960) has long suggested that the rural-urban differences derive from variations in population size and density, influencing factors like anonymity, labour division, informal and formal relationships, and status symbols, elements that notably impact criminal and safety aspects of these areas. Therefore, Ceccato and Abraham (2022) re-adopt the term ‘rural-urban continuum’ to describe a spectrum from isolated rural areas to the urban periphery’s connected spaces in a globalised world. In the future, we could expect that technological development and interdisciplinary research can support researchers in better framing the concept of rural-urban continuum concerning issues such as the impact of global organised crime on local communities.

Importantly, too, a consolidation of existing rural crime literature is essential – and this ought not be restricted to publications only in English. It is recommended that a large but coordinated international collaboration be established to document and synthesise extant knowledges from across the globe. For instance, there is a heightened level of scholarly activity occurring in non-English speaking parts of Europe – in Sweden and Slovenia for instance – but this will not necessarily or ordinarily be captured in a compilation produced by scholars in English speaking countries without the equal input and guidance from colleagues internationally.

Attention needs to be directed to motivating and mobilising the next generations of rural crime scholars, and to this end work is necessary to develop specific teaching material and pedagogical frameworks within our higher education institutions. Weisheit et al.’s (2022) edited collection on research methods provides a terrific guide for hands both old and new, but a similar collection on teaching methods would be highly desirable. Important, too, is consideration of research and teaching in different international contexts: what might be relevant factors in one location might not be at all pertinent in another. One of the initial studies in this area was carried out by Barclay et al. (2001) (see also Barclay, 2016) who suggested, among other ideas, the significance of linking and situating instances of rural crime within broader criminological theories and concepts. Further research is needed on the applicability of fieldwork inspection with protocols (Ceccato, 2019) in rural areas on the use of safety surveys on mobile phones, iPads and apps for data collections or as teaching tools.

Criminal justice systems

Contributors to this volume have unanimously emphasised the significance of rural law enforcement effectiveness and their crime prevention programs. Yarwood and Mawby’s (2010) focus on rural policing in the United Kingdom serves as a worthy template for a similar collection with a specific focus on Global South countries. Further evaluations should focus on the efforts of

rural-specific police units, aiming to reduce worry and bolster confidence among the rural residents. In certain country cases, such as in Australia, it is proposed that examining the impacts of specialised rural crime police units in determining their efficacy in preventing and combating rural crime would be beneficial. An idea would be to compare the nature of crime and crime rates in rural areas before and after the establishment of specialised rural crime police units to assess the effectiveness of these units in preventing and combating rural crime. These endeavours could well be advanced in partnership between police practitioners and academics: inspiration can be derived from Whiteside et al. (2023).

Research should inform whether and how investment in crime prevention and detection technology offers promising avenues to tackle crimes that happen in areas of the rural-urban continuum. Implementing a state-of-the-art surveillance system in rural areas to enhance law enforcement capabilities would be a goal. Introducing a mobile application that allows community members to report crimes and emergencies, improving communication with authorities. Lastly, assessing the broader impact of rural crime on communities and tailoring responses to address specific safety needs of those living and/or working in areas of the rural continuum is crucial for sustainable rural development in any part of the globe.

Although several chapters in this volume have commenced investigations of fear and perceptions of crime in rural places, and this ought to become a much more sustained endeavour. Afterall, offending has profound impacts upon victims. Farm crime impacts food supply and food prices, and has potentially disastrous bio-security ramifications as well as impacting productivity and the gross domestic product. The personal consequences for farmers themselves are equally impactful and serious, resulting in: financial costs through lost time, reduced annual income, higher insurance premiums; social impacts (such as on reduced community cohesiveness); deterioration of mental health; loss of bloodlines and intellectual property; disruption to production; productive farmers leaving the sector; and a high likelihood of repeat victimisation.

Studies of rural access to justice have emerged as a central area of focus for many scholars in various book chapters (for example Donnermeyer, 2023; Hale et al., 2021) and also in a complete edited collection which canvasses this topic across 11 different countries (Newman & Gordon, 2023). This groundswell of work can well be expanded to consider an even greater number of differing contexts, barriers to reporting crime including farm crime and interpersonal and/or sexual violence (especially against children and the elderly).

Peoples and places, flora and fauna, land and water

Hale and Harkness' (2023) edited volume in this *Routledge Studies in Rural Criminology* series considers the realities, representations and responses to

rural victimisation, serving as a basis for much more granular work. This could include, for instance, more sustained research on youth offending and victimisation, and farmers as offenders as well as victims. Here, too, future scholarship is necessary on an array of environmental and wildlife crimes and harms; poaching, illegal shooting and animal activism; and on natural resource extraction and enviro-social relationships between energy boomtowns and crime following on from the work of Ruddell (2017) in a Northern American context.

The effects of crime on the mental health of rural people is significantly under-studied. Smith (2020, 2022) has made impressive inroads on this in the United Kingdom, deploying surveys to ascertain the linkage between agricultural crime and farmers' mental health, but this is an area warranting much wider attention. Much research, including the chapters in this book, has hitherto focussed on the perspectives of rural people themselves: what is needed is a much greater focus also on the perspectives of law enforcement and other emergency service personnel and the impacts that crime investigation and maintain the peace has on their mental health. For all rural people, assessments of linkages between crime and suicide is also necessary in order for the scourge of suicide to be addressed through policy and practice reform. There exists a number of risk factors leading to rural suicide, such as isolation, vocational demands (such as in farming) and lack of access to services (Hirsch & Cukrowicz, 2014) and to these factors crime victimisation can be added.

Future surveys, though, might extend beyond property theft from farms, which was the pre-eminent focus of many surveys reported on in this book, to include violence offending and to capture more granular data on experiences and perceptions of anti-social offending in rural settings. There is also a need for more robust data on perspectives of police to then compare and contrast with the perspective of farmers, so as to determine what policy and practice reform might be necessary and/or desirable to bridge gaps in expectations – and thus address issues of trust and confidence in police.

Another area of focus ought to be on the least powerful in rural communities; those that are perhaps most susceptible to victimisation. Migrant farm workers are particularly vulnerable to modern day slavery (Byrne & Smith, 2023), as are backpackers and other itinerant workers. Children and young people (Ceccato et al., 2021), older people (Blundell et al., 2023), people with disabilities (Camilleri, 2023) and members of the LGBTIQ+ communities (especially young people) (Wike et al., 2022) each possess less power and voice and thus greater vulnerability. This book contributes to this field with Chapter 27 reporting women's transit safety in rural environments in India and Sweden and Chapter 28 illustrates the struggles of LGBTIQ+ groups in Sweden and Poland, in a comparison between urban and rural contexts. This is important as few studies have considered the rural experiences of homophobic and transphobic hate crime, despite evidence pointing to a higher probability of victimisation in rural areas (Ceccato & Abraham, 2022).

Future studies ought to focus on how safety in rural areas intersects with various factors, serving as an analytical tool for understanding groups disproportionately affected as victims and perpetrators, such as men, the young, the poor and individuals with a disability. Ceccato's (2016) study in Sweden exemplifies this by exploring how young individuals in areas with a weak sense of community are more likely to view crime as a means of resolving conflicts (Ceccato, 2016).

In 2005, the Victorian Parliament's Road Safety Committee (2005, p. v) inquired into, *inter alia*, 'the incidence and causative role of speed, drugs, alcohol and fatigues in rural road crashes' and 'the extent and effectiveness of enforcement activities in country Victoria'. Rurality exacerbates the level of risk taking and illegality, oftentimes because of the lack of acceptable alternatives such as taxi or public transport services. Road trauma is accentuated because of higher speeds, older vehicles, poorer quality roads and sparser law enforcement. While there have been a few studies undertaken since the turn of the twenty-first century, mostly in an Australian context (for example Edmonston et al., 2009), there exists a significant gap in knowledge broadly and internationally.

As with other proposals for future research, consideration of crime against people and places, flora and fauna, and land and water in a wide variety of contexts is crucial – and linkages drawn between these three areas. For instance, illegal sandmining in India has tremendous impacts on people downstream from where rivers and creek beds are scraped, on eco-systems and on sustainability. Crimes against heritage and the built environment, too, has enormous impacts. Consider, for instance, the impacts of the theft of lead roofs from village churches in England on the social fabric of those communities, or the destruction of ancient Indigenous rock art in Australia on the preservation of cultural significance (Grove & Thomas, 2014; Nicholas & Thomas, 2023).

Following McClanahan's (2023) development of a 'visual criminology', and various localised initiatives such as the 2023 Rural Crime and the Law Photo Competition (University of New England, 2023a, 2023b), the curating and scholarly analysis of visual representations of 'the rural' in different contexts would be an exciting development. Photography provides a means through which places and events can be captured and documented, connecting people through still images. Photographs allow us to share and absorb moments in time and serve as expressions of emotion. Importantly, they allow others to bear witness to deeply personal experiences, providing a vividness of detail not conveyed through other story telling methods. An international 'rural visual crime' project would allow for the defining and debating of perceptions and representations of rural crime, and consideration of the diverse nature of rural offending and victimisation. It could assist in identification of issues around both 'place' and 'space', and consideration as to how we might expand understandings of representations of crime beyond urban centres.

Types of crime

Drug manufacturing, trafficking, use and abuse in rural locations is highly impactful and has enormous social and economic consequences in rural locations. Collection of empirical data to test illicit drugs use and distribution across a diversity of rural locations would assist enormously (Donnermeyer, 2022), and in terms of assessing criminal justice responses very helpful would be the mapping of welfare and education programs, and identifying what works – such as comparing and contrasting welfarist programs with regressive law enforcement responses in other contexts (Baker, 2016).

Labour trafficking in the agricultural sector is receiving increased attention, alongside the more commonly known sex trafficking of women and children. Labour trafficking, distinct from smuggling, coerces individuals into involuntary servitude or debt bondage, particularly exploiting vulnerable, often foreign farm workers with limited legal protections (Barrick, 2016; Byrne & Smith, 2016).

In a globalised world, crime transcends borders (Harkness et al., 2022). Cross-border crimes, both internal within a country and external across international borders, are rife. There are numerous opportunities to explore the connections between transnational crime (including terrorism) and rurality (Baker, 2016), as well as organised crime and hate crime. The impacts of tourism on crime in rural areas is also an area of study demanding attention: after all, crime is not only constrained to tourist areas but also exhibited in locations with transient worker populations (Donnermeyer, 2022).

While cyber-crime and consumer fraud is truly borderless, there exist particular rural dimensions and oftentimes linked to vulnerabilities. Take, for instance, romance fraud and affinity fraud which can be leveraged against people in rural settings, particularly those who are vulnerable, lonely, isolated and without ready access to information and support services (Cross, 2020). This requires much greater scholarly attention, contextualising such offending as experienced by people living in rural settings, conceptualising rural and urban differences (Donnermeyer, 2023). Although there are several entries in the Encyclopedia of Rural Crime (Harkness et al., 2023a, 2023b) which attend to them, the prevalence of state and corporate crime, corruption and other financial crimes can be added to the list of crime types demanding further attention.

Methodological approaches

An in-depth understanding of rural crime requires engagement with the community. Rural-focussed scholars should consider combining quantitative surveys with qualitative methods, such as focus group discussions and interviews, to gain a deeper understanding of context and to capture nuanced experiences that may not be easily quantifiable. Understanding these specific

issues can enable police officers, safety experts and policymakers to design targeted interventions that address the unique needs of rural populations.

Face-to-face surveys with a representative sample of the rural population provide nuanced insights and have been highlighted as an important tool to capture problems of crime and victimisation. Contributors have highlighted the need to conduct focus groups (or similar) with rural residents offering a qualitative dimension, revealing the complexities of victimisation (nature), perceptions of violence, trust in the police and background to define crime prevention strategies tailored to particular contexts.

An additional or alternative approach would be to explore the use of social media data. Details on the advantages and challenges of the use of crowdsourced data by police officers in urban and rural contexts, for instance, can be found in Ceccato et al. (2021). Bullock et al. (2023) conducted an analysis of rural police use of Facebook pages in the United Kingdom and Australia and developed a publicly accessible sampling frame, strategy and coding book which could be expanded to numerous different contexts.

Survey responses from various country cases indicate the need to account for socio-economic and cultural factors in future research. Evaluating data over both short and long periods is crucial, if possible. Regular surveying, perhaps every five years, would allow for the collection of longitudinal data and evaluation of trends over time. For instance, the New Zealand study (Chapter 14) is based upon the third survey of farmers since 2016. Also, re-surveying existing cohorts would allow bigger sample sizes for more reliable statistical analysis. Surveys could be replicated and deployed across wider geographic areas in these countries to determine any regionally specific issues.

Additionally, efforts to capture the experiences of immigrant and non-English-speaking farmers, particularly through survey translation are crucial. In the United States, this means that special attention is needed for communities along the Southern border acknowledging potential variations in trust and reporting with the police. More broadly, it is recognised Asia is very under-represented in this book – only Japan (Chapter 12) is included – and thus, recognising the size of Asia in terms of number of countries and population, greater effort is necessary to collect data from across this continent. The same observation is made with regard to small island developing states across the Caribbean and throughout the South Pacific where data collection would assist in informing localised as well as island specific issues of rural crime and criminal justice responses.

Crime and fear are widely recognised as major obstacles to building sustainable communities. In cities, signs of unsustainability include poverty, deterioration, escalating crime and increasing fear of crime. As illustrated in this book, in rural areas these indicators may vary globally and it should come as no surprise that crime and safety are neglected in rural research studies that focus on what is called the social dimension of sustainable development (Ceccato, 2016).

There is a need for more research to thoroughly understand how issues of crime and safety affect sustainable rural development, especially focusing

on the interconnections between the Global North and the Global South. Green criminology, which deals with environmental crimes, climate change and ecological justice (White, 2013), directly links criminology to sustainability and it aligns with the goals of environmental protection, social equity and policy development. Education in criminology helps cultivate a knowledgeable society that understands the importance of sustainability and justice. The contribution of rural criminology is broader because it addresses crime and fear of crime as dimensions of social sustainability. Criminology addresses social issues like crime prevention, community safety and the rehabilitation of offenders. By reducing crime and fostering a sense of safety and justice, criminology contributes to the well-being and stability of communities, which are essential aspects of social sustainability.

Future directions for policy and practice

Suggestions presented by contributors to this volume show commonalities in overarching goals of enhancing rural safety. A common thread among the suggestions is the call for increased community engagement through community policing initiatives, educational campaigns, partnerships between law enforcement and residents, and the importance of fostering collaboration. This approach recognises that effective crime prevention requires active participation from both law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve, creating a shared responsibility for safety.

Having clear information about what happens and where and when happens is crucial to preventing and reducing crime. Globally, there is a lack of standardized data regarding the characteristics, locations and timing of crime incidents happening in rural areas. Therefore, an International Victimisation Rural Survey (IVRS) ought to be implemented across all continents to acquire a better estimate of the extent of victimisation and identify patterns that might go unnoticed or under-reported to the police. Such an instrument should be a near-identical survey with a statistically sound sample to provide more accurate insights into the unique challenges faced by individuals in these regions, shedding light on issues that may be overlooked in urban-focused surveys. A survey of this kind can also help prioritise areas that need additional attention and ensure that resources are distributed efficiently based on the actual needs of rural communities. Comparative studies based on an international victimisation survey would rely on a stronger comparative basis for safety interventions than the ones used hitherto and that are reported in this book.

There are numerous practical initiatives which can be considered to improve safety – and, as importantly, perceptions – in rural areas. For instance, improvements to messaging and communications through both traditional and social media will engage rural communities. This can be achieved through Rural Watch/Country Watch programs and websites, and facilitated by alert schemes which create, effectively, virtual online communities. This can be

coupled with both visible and overt policing practices. Crucial here, though, is the development of genuine partnerships – such efforts should not be considered a ‘box-ticking’ exercise, which will be seen for what they are and thus eminently ineffective. The key is to build lasting partnerships and the building of confidence and trust, resulting in awareness, education, prevention, resilience, engagement and creating ‘active citizens.

However, while community engagement is considered a crucial element in effective crime prevention, there is a need for strategies that actively seek to include voices from all segments of the community. In previous research, there has been a concern that such initiatives may inadvertently reflect only a portion of the population, potentially leading to biased policing practices.

Another shared theme is the emphasis on technological solutions, advocating for the integration of data, the use of smart technology, and increased engagement with social media. These commonalities underscore a recognition of the evolving approaches to crime prevention, where advancements in technology play an important role in both community awareness and law enforcement efforts in the most remote areas across the Globe. For instance, by implementing smart technology, like online reporting systems, to bridge the gap for those living far from police stations, allowing remote reporting and communication with law enforcement.

While technology serves as a unifying factor, recommendations also showcase a nuanced understanding of the diverse challenges faced by different demographic groups in areas of the rural-urban continuum. For example, there is a specific focus on empowering vulnerable populations, including rural women, children, the LGBTQI+ communities, disabled individuals and older adults. This acknowledgment of diverse needs reflects a commitment to inclusivity and ensuring that crime prevention strategies cater to the unique vulnerabilities experienced by various segments of the rural population.

Despite the positive experiences of police authority centralisation in some countries for improving investigations and analysis, the suggestions in this book emphasise decentralisation and a localised approach to crime prevention as a shared priority. Contributors to this volume suggest that while centralisation has proven effective in some contexts, their experience indicates that the local policing model acknowledges that crime prevention strategies are most successful when they are contextually relevant and community-specific, allowing for more targeted and effective crime prevention measures.

Moreover, a better understanding of how law enforcement can engage discrete populations for the success of crime prevention initiatives is necessary. By organising regular community meetings where law enforcement officials can interact with residents, discuss safety concerns and provide updates on crime prevention efforts. This may create an open line of communication and foster collaboration that can also continue digitally, through the use of mobile safety applications.

The suggestions also underscore the importance of addressing the socio-economic conditions of rural residents intertwined with crime prevention

initiatives. Addressing rural infrastructure challenges requires considering the needs of diverse populations living in remote areas, facing long distances to essential services. Initiatives such as empowering rural women economically, promoting education campaigns for farmers, and supporting victims of interpersonal crimes reflect a general understanding that crime prevention extends beyond traditional law enforcement efforts. By addressing these issues and empowering communities, these suggestions aim to create long-term and more sustainable solutions to rural crime and/or poor safety conditions in rural contexts.

Responsibility for crime control and prevention ought not be limited to government actors and non-government agencies. For rural people themselves, taking some degree of responsibility and paying heed to implementation of situational crime prevention measures, target hardening and implementation capable guardianship (whether human or electronic) is vital. Here the emphasis ought to be on increasing the effort for offenders, increasing risk and reducing reward – achieved through, for example, greater vigilance, awareness and reporting; implementation of situational crime prevention measures; looking out for neighbours, suspicious vehicles, unusual activity; being vigilant and staying alert; being aware of unusual behaviour and reporting it; having properties look occupied; maintaining a permanent or random presence at properties; and installation of cameras and other technologies, which has the added value of evidence provision to police.

Limitations

There are clear limitations of this study, a pre-eminent one being the variation in crime definitions across different countries. As with any other comparative study of this type, these differences can pose challenges when trends are compared, as each country's legal framework and cultural context influence how crime is classified and reported. Ideally, future research would benefit from a unified international survey in rural areas, helping to minimise these discrepancies. However, to cover many issues and contexts, a universal survey instrument might well become very lengthy and thus impacting response rates. To account for specificities of different country contexts, latitude to add or subtract non-core questions would be necessary.

Despite these limitations, reporting evidence from 19 country cases, as presented in this book, is important in providing a foundational understanding of rural safety conditions acknowledging the variations in perceptions of safety by different groups, yet offering valuable insights that can inform future research and policy-making.

Conclusion

This book explores the complex interplay between peoples, places and rurality, specifically addressing issues of crime and safety. Through a comprehensive comparative analysis across 19 countries, this edited volume offers an

insightful look into these dynamics within a diversity of rural settings around the world. Irrespective of location, people in rural areas (and their properties) must deal with crime and safety and often face long distances to police and other services. Poor safety conditions impact people's mobility, diminish their educational and employment opportunities and, in extreme cases, their life chances.

Comparing total crime figures between countries can be misleading owing to differing definitions, legal systems and reporting practices. As such, in this book, an effort has been made to concentrate on providing 'the bigger picture' based on general trends for a more meaningful comparison, revealing patterns and influences in crime across various context. This allows for the provision of valuable insights into the underlying factors driving these trends globally within particular rural contexts.

Supported by these findings, readers can reflect upon future strategies and policies to enhance the safety and quality of life for those residing or working in these rural areas. While there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution for these problems, the evidence and lessons learned from each country's case study provide valuable insights. This knowledge may serve as a first step to critically address these specific challenges and adapt crime prevention measures to better address the problems. There is, without doubt, a need for further scholarship, without which our understanding of crime causation in rural areas is incomplete, and which inhibits appropriate formal responses. That is, there is a clear linkage between the need for further scholarship and gaps in knowledge to be filled, and evidence-based reforms made to existing criminal justice processes.

By aligning with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this book has attempted to highlight the importance of safety as a dimension of social sustainability. The book underscores the need for strategies specifically tailored for those in rural areas, advocating a collaborative approach involving local communities, governments and stakeholders which is based on knowledge, sometimes from different disciplines. This book stands out for its multidisciplinary approach, with contributions from experts in fields including criminology, law, geography and political science, to name just a few. This diversity has enriched the analysis, providing a well-rounded view of rural crime and safety from multiple perspectives.

For future progress, it is essential that research, policy and practice be considered in tandem. This integrated approach ensures that each aspect informs and reinforces each other, leading to more comprehensive approaches to address rural safety. Adopting the adage, 'a problem shared is a problem solved', and to achieve this, much greater effort can be directed to forming long-lasting strategic partnerships between academia and practice. Scholars and practitioners alike are encouraged to seek each other out, using established networks as required, to work together to gather data and to implement meaningful reforms that will improve safety across the rural-urban continuum.

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